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Tucson's crime survivors say the legislature is re-victimizing them

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By Barbara Grijalva - [email](#)

TUCSON, AZ (KOLD) - A program that helps local crime victims cope with tragic loss is becoming a victim of the state budget crisis.

Survivors of crime are saying the state legislature is re-victimizing them.

To help balance the state budget, state lawmakers want to raid the fund that provides a multitude of services to victims of violent crime.

The victims who are being affected are children and adults.

"How will taking money away from program helping families get through violent loss of a loved one help this community," said Melissa Royce, whose fiance was murdered in 2008.

That's the message survivors and victim advocates had for state lawmakers who already have taken \$2.6 million from the victim compensation and assistance fund.

There's a proposal in the legislature to take another \$800,000.

Loved ones of victims, and other survivors of violent crimes told how local services helped them with everything from funeral planning and expenses, to counseling.

"No one wants to bury their loved one, especially at the age of 22. The entire staff at Homicide Survivors has been caring and has generously continued to offer advice, counseling, information and, above all else, friendship," Royce said.

Linda Berrie's daughter, a mother of two, was murdered.

"You're just numb. You just want to sit in a room with your family and hug each other. But there are so many details that have to be taken care of," Berrie said.

Gaby Jerez is now a successful businesswoman thanks to help from victim advocates.

As a child she had been repeatedly sexually abused.

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"Before finding SACASA (Southern Arizona Center Against Sexual Assault), my efforts to avoid pain, shame and depression, trauma's lasting effects, put me at high risk of destructive habits," Jerez said.

Among the most vulnerable victims who are affected by the legislature's actions are the children who have been sexually or physically abused.

"They need to have adults around them that can help support them through the steps of healing. They need adults that can help them through the court process," said Wilene Lampert, Executive Director of the Southern Arizona Children's Advocacy Center.

Why not cut these programs when the legislature is chopping so many others?

The money for victim services is not taxpayer money.

"It comes from criminals like those who chose to put us in these horrible situations," Melissa Royce said.

It's money criminals are ordered to pay into a fund crime victims worked to set up years ago.

"It's being stolen. I mean they're reaching in. They're grabbing the money and they're stealing it from the victims," said Pima County Attorney Barbara LaWall.

People who are coping, thanks to help they've received, also are worried about future victims.

"It's not a feeling you're ever prepared to deal with. And to have to deal with that and attempt to go it alone, it's scary. It's frightening and it's even dangerous," said Angel Sanchez, whose former partner, the mother of his child, was murdered.

Gaby Jerez' message to state lawmakers: "Please don't victimize people like me twice."

Just to show you how long the legal process can be for the victims, one of the women in this report, Linda Berrie was preparing to be in court again on the day after the news conference.

She would be there for the sentencing of the man who murdered her daughter nearly one-and-half-years ago.

The survivors and advocates at the news conference are hoping for a grassroots phone call, email and letter-writing campaign.

They hope to convince Arizona legislators to stop taking money from the victim funds.

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